THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI MADHAVSINH SOLANKI): (a) No, Sir.

(b) Does not arise.

(c) Does not arise.

Relations with Kuwait

1659. SHRI MENTAY PADMANABHAM: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government's attention has been drawn to the news item captioned "Delay in cementing ties with Kuwait costs India dear" in Financial Express dated 17th February, 1992.

(b) if so, what steps are being taken for smoother relations with Kuwait;

(c) what was the result of the talks recently held in Kuwait at ministerial level;

(d) wheher any break through has been achieved in increasing workers participation in Kuwait; and

(e) the number of Indians in Kuwait as on 31st January, 1992?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI MADHAVSINH SOLANKI): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) to (d) During the recent visit to Kuwait by the External Affairs Minister on February 15 and 16, 1992, both sides agreed to strengthen and deepen their bilateral relations. They signed an agreement to form a Joint Commission at a Ministerial level, send a high level delegation to India for trade, commerce, investment, defence etc. The two sides also agreed to facilitate the recruitment of workers from India.

(e) the number of Indians in Kuwait as on 31st January, 1992 is estimated to be 75,000.

Omission of Jammu and Kashmir as integral part of India by Foreign Airlines in their maps

1660. SHRI SANTOSH BAGRODIA: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that most European Airlines are not showing Jammu and Kashmir as part of India in their maps;

(b) if so, what are the details thereof; and

(c) what steps Government have taken in this regard?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI MADHAVSINH SOLANKI): (a) and (b) Most European Airlines depict only general physical featuers and not precise political boundaries in their maks?

(c) Whenever maps in foreign publications which incorrectly depict India's external boundaries come to Government's notice, the matter is taken up with the publisher and/or the concerned Government.

Supply of Passports

1661. SHRI SYED SIBTEY RAZI: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether some move to accept the passport fee either in cash or in bank draft in future is under consideration;

(b) if so, the details thereof with objectives behind this;

(c) whether some move to authorise recognised travel agents to attest photographs and other supporting documents of applicants seeking passports is also under Government's consideration;

(d) if so, the details thereof with objectives behind this;

(e) whether Government also propose to take some steps to ensure that passports are issued to people within stipulated time schedule of

receipt of their requests in this regard; and

(f) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI MADHAVSINH SOLANKI): (a) and (b) For convenience of public, passport fee will be accepted in cash as well as by bank drafts at option of applicants.

(c) Yes, Sir.

(d) The objective behind this is to make recognised travel agents more responsible for genuineness of documents submitted by them.

(e) and (f) The Government have liberalised certain procedures for expeditous issue of passports, details of which are given in the Statement. (Please refer to the Statement appended to the USQ 1593). However, the passport offices are not able to issue passports within the target time due to heavy increase in input applications, staff constraints and passports being written manually.

Shifting of Delhi Passport Office

1662. SHRI SYED SIBTEY RAZI: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Passport Office in Delhi has been working in a very limited space having no scope of cross ventilation in summer season;

(b) whether it is also a fact that Delhi Passport Office has been working on second floor of Shastri Bhawan without any provision of lift;

(c) whether Government are aware that aged applicants find it difficult to climb the stairs to reach Passport Office; and

(d) if so, wheher Government propose to shift Delhi Passport Office at some ground floor and airy building in central locality?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI MADHAVSINH SOLANKI): (a) to (d) The Passport Office in Delhi which is presently located on the second floor of Shastri Bhawan and where there is no provision for lift, is seriously short of space. Government are aware of a number of difficulties resulting from this, particularly inconvenience to applicants, including aged applicants who have to climb the stairs. It is accordingly proposed to shift the passport Office to a location where there is adequate space and which is convenient for applicants.

Simplification of Passports issuance Procedure

1663. SHRI SYED SIBTEY RAZI: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether there is any proposal under Government's consideration to ensure renewal and other miscellaneous work relating to passport are done within a week's time;

(b) if so, the details thereof;

(c) whether such move is to be implemented in near future;

(d) whether Government propose to take some other measures to ensure that seekers of passports are put to little inconvenience; and

(e) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI MADHAVSINH SOLANKI): (a) to (c) Presently 14 Passport Offices are already renewing passports and rendering other miscellaneous services within a week's time. Seven other Passport Offices are not able to do this work within a week's time.

(d) and (e) The Government have liberalised procedures to facilitate expeditious issue of passport services. The details are given in the Statement (Please refer to the statement appended to the USQ 1593). A proposal to augment staff strength of the Passport Offices is also under consideration.